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## Viewing cable 08MANAMA593, RIVALS FOR BAHRAIN'S SHI'A STREET: WIFAQ AND HAQ

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08MANAMA593**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08MANAMA593	2008-09-04 14:34	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Manama

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9115>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9116>  
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/9117>  
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8104  
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0289  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1041  
RHBVAKS/COMUSNAVCENT  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAMA 000593

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#) [BA](#)  
SUBJECT: RIVALS FOR BAHRAIN'S SHI'A STREET: WIFAQ AND HAQ

REF: A. 05 MANAMA 1773

[1](#)B. 06 MANAMA 49  
[1](#)C. 06 MANAMA 1728  
[1](#)D. 07 MANAMA 113  
[1](#)E. 07 MANAMA 190  
[1](#)F. 07 MANAMA 810  
[1](#)G. 07 MANAMA 1046  
[1](#)H. MANAMA 336  
[1](#)I. MANAMA 404  
[1](#)J. MANAMA 407  
[1](#)K. MANAMA 420  
[1](#)L. MANAMA 510  
[1](#)M. MANAMA 536  
[1](#)N. MANAMA 592

Classified By: Ambassador Adam Ereli for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and introduction: Bahrain's leading Shi'a parties Wifaq and Haq compete for the support of the Shi'a community, which constitutes 60-70 percent of Bahrain's citizen population. Wifaq engages and cooperates with the government and is at pains to stay on the right side of the law. Some Haq leaders, by contrast, inspire low-level street violence, and call demonstrations that often get out of hand. The GOB and many mainstream Bahraini politicians believe Haq seeks to provoke the authorities and create martyrs. Relations between leaders of Wifaq and Haq, once cordial, are now strained. While Wifaq has the support of most of the Shi'a community, Haq gains strength whenever Wifaq is perceived as ineffective at obtaining redress for Shi'a grievances against the government. End summary and introduction.

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A Shared History  
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[1](#)2. (U) Many Shi'a activists exiled from Bahrain in the nineties continued their opposition activities in the London-based Bahrain Freedom Movement. Following King Hamad's 2001 amnesty, most of these exiles returned to Bahrain and founded the Wifaq National Islamic Society. Leading Bahraini cleric Sheikh Issa Qassim, a member of the 1973 parliament, publicly renounced politics when he returned to Bahrain, but remained Wifaq's spiritual adviser (ref M). Midlevel cleric Sheikh Ali Salman served as Wifaq's president and Hassan Mushaima served as vice president.

[1](#)3. (U) Wifaq boycotted the 2002 parliamentary elections to protest the government's unilateral amendments to the constitution, the expanded legislative role of an appointed upper house, and the alleged roll-back of freedoms granted by the constitution of 1973. Perhaps even more importantly, Wifaq protested the pardon legislation "Law (56)" of 2002,

which extended the 2001 amnesty to protect government officials from sanction for any crimes they committed during the turmoil of the '90s.

#### Bahrain Center for Human Rights

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¶4. (U) Over the next few years Shi'a villagers began demonstrating against alleged government discrimination. Abdulhadi Al Khawaja, a Shi'a Islamist on the board of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), encouraged the Shi'a demonstrations, and the BCHR became increasingly critical of the government. The GOB withdrew BCHR's operating license and closed the center's offices in September 2004. Al Khawaja was elected BCHR president in 2005, beating BCHR's founding president, secular liberal Nabeel Rajab. BCHR continued to agitate among the Shi'a, and Al Khawaja began working closely with Mushaima and former university professor Abduljalil Singace.

#### Haq Splits from Wifaq

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¶5. (U) The Political Societies Act of 2005 allowed for so-called "political societies," which operate as parties, but required that they register with the Justice Ministry. After a long internal debate, Wifaq chose in October, 2005 to register as a society and run candidates in the next parliamentary elections. Hasan Mushaima left Wifaq in September 2005 to protest Wifaq's pending decision. In November, 2006, Wifaq candidates won their contests in all 17 constituencies where the party competed. Mushaima founded the un-registered Haq ("right") movement in November 2005 (ref A) (Note: Mushaima's Haq movement should not be confused with the liberal Lana Haq ("We have a right") movement, which

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was founded weeks before, as post did in ref A. End Note.).

#### Wifaq Today

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¶6. (U) Wifaq's dues-paying members meet in its Assembly every other year to elect a Secretary General, as well as half of the 30-member Shura (Consultative) council to four year terms (ref I). The SecGen nominates a ten-man General Secretariat, which runs day-to-day business.

¶7. (C) The society's numerous volunteer committees work on issues of concern to Wifaq's constituents, such as housing, religious issues, and community development. As Secretary General, Sheikh Ali Salman leads the General Secretariat, the parliamentary bloc, and the Shura (ref I).

¶8. (C) Wifaq faced numerous setbacks in the 2007-2008 session of parliament. This frustrated its membership (refs F and K), but the party leadership remains committed to participating in parliamentary politics. Sheikh Ali Salman told Ambassador in April that he is tired of trying to enforce party discipline, but he will continue to keep Wifaq engaged with the GOB. Hamed Khalaf, a Wifaq Shura member, told poloff that he anticipates Wifaq will again run candidates in 2010. Dr. Jassim Hussein, a Wifaq member of parliament, told poloff that many of Wifaq's MPs, including Sheikh Ali Salman, will not stand for reelection, although Salman will continue as Secretary General. Hussein, an economist, predicts that the party's delegation in the next parliament will include more technocrats like himself and Jawad Fairouz, an engineer; he foresees fewer "emotional" oppositionists like Fairouz's older brother, Jalal. Wifaq Shura member Nizar Al Qari, another moderate, predicted a similar shift when he told poloff before the party's internal elections in May that Wifaq is developing beyond its conservative, religious origins, led by the technocrats. True to Qari's prediction, the moderates came out on top in those elections (ref I).

¶9. (C) Bahraini officials regularly accuse Haq of seeking to provoke the authorities and create martyrs. For example, Interior Minister Rashid bin Abdullah al-Khalifah told DCM in July that youths arrested for rioting often tell the police during questioning that they were paid to stone police patrols and set garbage fires. Police Major Abdallah Haram asserted to Pol/Econ chief that Haq and BCHR were behind the payments. The GOB, however, has not produced any evidence to back these accusations. Dr. Abdulla Al Derazi, Secretary General of the Bahrain Human Rights Society, told poloff that he believes Haq SecGen Mushaima may at times want to restrain these young men but has lost any control he may once have had over them.

¶10. (C) Haq regularly coordinates its activities with the disbanded Bahrain Center for Human Rights. (Note: Nabeel Rajab, the BCHR's vice president described the cooperation to poloff as a necessity that he would rather do without. End note.) A January 2006 speech by Abdulhadi Al Khawaja describes how BCHR and Haq will pressure the GOB by appealing to international organizations and other governments (ref B). According to two accounts of King Hamad's July 19 meeting with journalists, he specifically warned against activists appealing to "foreign agendas" (ref L), an apparent reference to Haq and its contacts with Western human rights activists. Haq's media specialist Singace maintains close ties to, and provides information for, international human rights NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Freedom House, and Frontline Defenders who identify BCHR as their principal partner in Bahrain. According to Mohammed Al Maskati, president of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights and Al Khawaja's son-in-law, Frontline recently hired Al Khawaja as their Middle East bureau chief.

#### A Troubled Relationship -----

¶11. (C) Haq has now co-opted the Bahrain Freedom Movement, which continues to operate in London. Lord Eric Avebury, vice chair of the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group, has for years been a vocal supporter of Haq and a critic of the GOB. During King Hamad's visit to London in January 2008, he met Mushaima and Dr. Sayed Shihabi, an active Bahrain Freedom Movement leader who rejected the amnesty and chose to remain in London. Wifaq leaders such as Sheikh Ali Salman, Abduljalil Khalil, and Mohammed Jameel Al Jamri used to

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attend the Bahrain Freedom Movement's annual meetings, but didn't go in 2007 or 2008. Mushaima attacked Wifaq in the media, calling them "Inbataha'een," a colloquialism that equates to "groveling dogs" after Salman and other Wifaq leaders skipped a scheduled meeting with Avebury in 2007.

¶12. (C) In an e-mail to supporters, Singace described the August 21, 2008 meeting of the Bahrain Freedom Movement in London. Singace reported that attendees discussed alleged gerrymandering in Bahrain, as well as restrictions on media freedom, notably the alleged media ban against Ghada Jamsheer. (Note: For more than a year Jamsheer has asserted to Western NGOs that she is unable to publish because of an alleged GOB campaign to muzzle her. Emboffs have repeatedly asked the editors of Bahrain's daily newspapers if any media ban against Jamsheer exists. All of the editors reply that there is no such ban -- they have simply chosen not to publish her work. Mansour Al Jamri, editor in chief of the Shi'a opposition daily Al Wasat, told a visiting IREX team that Jamsheer verbally assaulted him and has sent him insulting text messages from her employees' mobile phones. Jamri, himself no friend of the government, said he will not publish Jamsheer because she is "crazy." End Note.)

¶13. (C) Despite robust public criticism of many GOB policies, Wifaq's leaders generally maintain good relationships with

the GOB. Several senior officials from the Ministry of Interior have privately told emboffs that they appreciate Wifaq's efforts to keep the streets calm. According to local contacts, Sheikh Ali Salman regularly implores demonstrators to obtain a permit before marching. He has spoken dismissively of Haq's chaotic demonstrations and minor riots, pointing out that when Wifaq stages a protest, it is large and disciplined.

¶14. (C) However, Haq's message does strike a chord with many Shi'a. Haq sympathizers, and even many moderate Shi'a, claim that the government hasn't really changed under King Hamad. Wifaq leaders regularly complain to emboffs that the GOB doesn't "give" them anything to take to their constituents. Further, they say that Wifaq's failure to achieve any of its objectives by engaging with the government will lead to greater support for Haq, and, potentially, an increase in street violence.

¶15. (C) Comment: Despite the impatience of many Shi'a, it is undeniable that King Hamad's reforms have changed much here. There is now an opposition press, and the arrest and exile of political oppositionists is a thing of the past. Nevertheless, Haq and Wifaq compete for Shi'a support against a background of real frustration on the Shi'a street. When Wifaq is perceived as ineffective in parliament, Haq gains more adherents for its strategy of extra-parliamentary opposition. When Wifaq can show that its cooperation with the government has produced jobs, housing or more political representation for Shi'a, support for Haq's radical message subsides.

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